



Died: May 15, 1886, 6 pm, @*Sunset*

“For I wear the ‘Thorns’ till *Sunset* —”

Poem 1737

The Day that I Shall Go

Emily's Death

Like other Prophets before her, Emily Dickinson had direct contact with the divine world. As proof, the poet was told when she was going to die. Emily hid that time in her poetry until the end of the age when it would be unraveled, along with its surprising message about the Messiah. The story starts with the discovery of Dickinson's prophecy about "The Day that I shall go."

Let's begin with a few poems with a common theme: Dickinson's death!

412

I read my sentence – steadily –
Reviewed it with my eyes,
To see that I made no mistake
In its extremest clause –
The Date, and manner, of the shame –
And then the Pious Form
That "God have mercy" on the Soul
The Jury voted Him –
I made my soul familiar – with her extremity –
That at the last, it should not be a novel Agony –
But she, and Death, acquainted –
Meet tranquilly, as friends –
Salute, and pass, without a Hint –
And there, the Matter ends –

(Johnson p.196)

(Autumn 1862)

(Bolded words are keywords from the poem.)

In Poem 412 above, Dickinson **steadies** herself as she **reads** her **sentence** carefully, ensuring she has **made no mistake**. She then **reviews** the **sentence** again and again because of its importance.

Then there is a riddle: What is the **extremist clause** of a **sentence**? The answer is the final or ending **clause**, which makes the **extremest clause** of a life **sentence** a **Death sentence** because **Death** is at the end of life. Therefore, the poet must be reading her **Death** sentence! The rest of the poem confirms that conclusion because it, too, is about her **Death**.

The poet then tells us that the **Death sentence** contains the **Date and manner of the shame**. "**The shame**" is Emily's way of referring to her **Death**. Therefore, **the Date and manner of the shame** are the **Date and manner** of Emily's future **Death** or, in other words, the details surrounding her future **Death**.

In the next stanza, the poet envisions a minister in the background as she watches over the scene of her future funeral. The minister is **Piously Proclaiming**: "**God have mercy on the Soul**" during the ceremony.

The poet then tells us she **made her Soul familiar** with the details of her future **Death** so that when the time came, she would be **acquainted** with it and could meet it **tranquilly** as an old **friend**.

When Dickinson wrote this poem, she was 32 years old and wouldn't die for another 24 years, but when she did die, her **Death** occurred precisely as her **Death sentence** stated, as we will see.

In the main, I think that *literal readings* are often the best way to understand Dickinson. Also, much of her poetry is autobiographical, as will become clear in this text.

Dickinson's biographers and family members commented that the poet was preoccupied with **Death**. Perhaps the shock of reading her **Death Sentence** contributed to that personality trait.

Next, in Poem 50, Emily tells us there is a **Riddle within** the poem, which **One will walk today**.

50

I haven't told my garden yet –

Lest that should conquer me.

I haven't quite the strength now

To break it to the Bee –

I will not name it in the street

For shops would stare at me –

That one so shy – so ignorant

Should have the face to die.

The hillsides must not know it –

Where I have rambled so –

Nor tell the loving forests

The day that I shall go –

Nor lisp it at the table –

Nor heedless by the way

Hint that within the Riddle

One will walk today –

(Johnson p.27)

(Autumn 1858)

Dickinson had the habit of walking through the **gardens** and wooded **hillsides** surrounding her Amherst family estate. It was a near-daily occurrence.

In Poem 50 above, Emily muses that she will not **tell it** to the **garden**, to the **Bee**, to the **shops**, to the **hillsides**, or her family at the dinner **table**. What is **it** that the poet won't **tell**? Dickinson tells us that **it** is **the day that she shall go**, or in other words, the **day that she will** die. Dickinson explains that if she were to announce the **day that she would** die to any of the listed parties (**garden, Bee, shops, hillsides, table**), they would **stare at her** as the **shops** did. The poet then says that **one so ignorant and shy** as she **ought not to have the face to die**. In other words, Dickinson feels she is too insignificant to merit the attention she would attract by announcing the day of her **death**.

Emily **read** her **Death sentence** in Poem 412 and learned how and when she would **die**. In Poem 50, she confesses that she will not **tell anyone the day that she will go** for fear of being **stared at**.

In the final stanza, Dickinson predicts that **One will walk within the Riddle** of her **Death** and solve it.

Dickinson is saying she knows how and when she will die. How is that possible? Is there any proof to back up her claim?

A **Riddle** is a statement or set of statements that have a veiled meaning, put forth as a puzzle to be solved. Dickinson loved **Riddles**. They are scattered throughout her poems.

One might wonder if there are any additional pieces to this **Riddle** about the poet's **death**. Consider Poem 24 below:

24

There is a morn by men unseen –
Whose maids upon remoter green
Keep their Seraphic May –
And all day long, with dance and game,
And gambol I may never name –
Employ their holiday.

Here to light measure, move the feet
Which walk no more the village street –
Nor by the wood are found –
Here are the birds that sought the sun
When last year's distaff idle hung
And summer's brows were bound.

Ne'er saw I such a wondrous scene –
Ne'er such a ring on such a green –
Nor so serene array –

As if the stars some summer night
Should swing their cups of Chrysolite –
And revel till the day –

Like thee to dance – like thee to sing –
People upon the mystic green –
I ask, each new May Morn.
I wait thy far, fantastic bells –
Announcing me in other dells –
Unto the different dawn!

(Johnson p.17)

(Summer 1858)

In Poem 24, Dickinson describes a scene in heaven that is usually **unseen** by mortal eyes. There are **maids** there **who Keep their Seraphic May**. **Seraphic** means Angelic. Therefore, these **maids** were angels. The angels **play and gambol all day long**, happily, as if on a perpetual **holiday**. The location of this activity was **remote** and **unseen** by **men** because it was in heaven. The residents' **feet have ceased to walk the village street** because they have died and left the mortal sphere. The residents were **light-footed, serene**, and joyful, as if on a **holiday** because heaven is blissful and carefree.

The poet **asks the angels every Morning in May** if it is time for her to be **announced in “Other dells with far fantastic bells.”** “**Other dells with far fantastic bells**” is the poet's description of *heaven*. Why did Emily ask the angels **each new May Morn** if it was time to go to heaven? Dickinson died on **May 15, 1886**. Logically, she must have known when writing this poem in 1858 that she would die in **May** but didn't know the particular day or year. Therefore, she had to keep asking the angels **each new May Morn** if that day was the special one where she would die and go to heaven. We can deduce, therefore, that **May** was one of the details (**the Date and manner of the shame**) included in her **Death sentence** in Poem 412.

When Emily was alone, she was often observed as “standing with rapt attention when she was alone as if she were listening to something very faint and far off.” Nothing has been made of it until now, but, as further information will show, Dickinson likely had visions of the heavenly world during those rapt episodes. The poet also mentions **Visions** in Poems 462 and 528, further supporting their existence. **Visions** of heaven would explain her interactions with angels in this poem and others.

Let's look at another poem referencing **May** as the month of Emily's future **Death**.

1422

Summer has two Beginnings –
Beginning once in June –
Beginning in October
Affectingly again –

Without, perhaps, the Riot
But graphicker for Grace –
As finer is a going
Than a remaining Face –

Departing then – forever –
Forever – until May –
Forever is deciduous –
Except to those who die –

(Johnson p.606)

(1877)

In this challenging poem, 1422, there are two **Summers**. The regular **Summer** begins in June and ends in August. Then, after a short pause, Indian **Summer** starts in October. After Indian **Summer**, there is a long pause until regular **Summer** returns. Dickinson believes that Indian **Summer** is **finer** and has more **Grace** than traditional **Summer** because it is more fleeting and departs for a longer time.

Waiting for regular **Summer** to return each winter seemed like **Forever** to Dickinson. She stated that this recurring type of **Forever** was **deciduous** because it repeated yearly with the seasons. The poet then says **Forever** would stop being **deciduous** if one were to **die** in **May**. In that case, **Death** would change the recurring **deciduous Forever** into the endless permanent type of **Forever**, namely eternity.

When writing this poem, Emily must have known that she would die in **May**, some year, and enter eternity **Forever**. Otherwise, there would have been no reason to write a poem that associated **May** with **Death**. Poem 1422 is the second poem that singles out **May** as the month of Dickinson's **Death**.

In the following poem, 443, Dickinson gives us the exact time of day that her **Death** would occur. I will focus only on the first two stanzas for now.

443

(First two stanzas)

I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –
Life's little duties do – precisely –
As the very least
Were infinite – to me –

I put new Blossoms in the Glass –
And throw the old – away –
I push a petal from my Gown
That anchored there – I weigh
The time 'twill be till six o'clock

I have so much to do –
And yet–Existence–some way back –
Stopped – struck – my ticking – through –
We cannot put Ourselves away
As a completed Man
Or Woman – When the Errand's done
We came to Flesh – upon –
There may be – Miles on Miles of Nought –
Of Action – sicker far –

(Johnson p.212)

(Spring 1863)

Dickinson informs us in the last few lines of Poem 443 that **the Errand's done**. We know the **Errand** was critical because Dickinson says she **came to Flesh upon** it. That means God brought her to life to accomplish the **Errand** for Him. Now, her mission is finished. The poet explains that even though her all-important **Errand** is finished, she cannot just **put Herself away** as a **completed Woman**. She still has to get through the rest of her life, so she **ties her Hat, creases her Shawl, puts Blossoms in the glass, and pushes petals from her gown** as if those **little duties** were **infinite** to her. This helps her get through the **Miles and Miles of Naught** she has to endure until she dies. She **weighs the time 'twill be till six o'clock** because she knows that is the time of day she will die. Dickinson must have learned the time of her death by reading her **death sentence** in Poem 412.

Dickinson died on **May 15, 1886**, at *precisely* **six o'clock**.

In the following poem, 1737, Dickinson tells us she will die during a **Sunset**, which makes the time of her death **six o'clock** p.m., not a.m.

1737

(Italics are Dickinson's/Last three stanzas)

Love that never leaped its socket –
Trust entrenched in narrow pain –
Constancy thro' fire – awarded –
Anguish – bare of anodyne!

Burden – borne so far triumphant –
None suspect me of the crown,
For I wear the "Thorns" till *Sunset* –
Then – my Diadem put on.

Big my Secret but it's *bandaged* –

It will never get away
Till the Day its Weary Keeper
Leads it through the Grave to thee.

(Johnson p.704)

(Late 1861)

In Poem 1737 above, Dickinson describes the **pain and agony** of her unconsummated **Love**. The “**7 years of troth**” refers to the time elapsed since her first meeting with her beloved Wadsworth in 1855. The poet states that her **Love never leaped its socket** because they needed to remain apart. Dickinson says she had borne the **burden** of suffering **triumphantly** and is proud **no one suspects her of the crown** (discussed next chapter). The poet then says she will **wear the crown of “Thorns” till Sunset** and then **put her Diadem on**. The **crown of Thorns** is the **crown** of suffering worn during life, while a **Diadem** is a royal **crown** of gems worn after death and resurrection. Therefore, **Sunset** is used here to represent the end of her life. She knows her life will end during a **Sunset**.

Sunset tells us that **six o’clock** from the previous poem is p.m., not a.m. In addition, **Sunset** confirms the **six o’clock** time because **six o’clock** is the time the sun would have been setting at that location at that time of the year.

On **May 15**, 1886, Dickinson died at precisely **six o’clock** p.m. The poet predicted the month and *exact time* of day of her death.

Austin, Emily Dickinson’s brother, kept a daily journal. His journal entry for that day gives us the time of Emily’s death.

- Austin’s Journal May 15th

It was settled before morning broke that Emily would not wake again on this side.

The day was awful. She ceased to breathe that terrible breathing just before the (afternoon) whistle sounded for six.

Mrs. Montague and Mrs. Jameson were sitting with Vin.

I was nearby.⁴⁶

In conclusion, Dickinson told us in **Riddles** that she would die in **May** at precisely **six o’clock** p.m. during a **Sunset**, long before the event occurred. Her prediction that **within the Riddle, One will walk today** has been fulfilled **today**. The **Riddle** of her **Death** has been solved **today**. **Today** is the day of the poem’s fulfillment.

How did Dickinson know when she would die, and how did she know that **One** person would solve the obscure **Riddle** hidden in her poems and room?

The fact that Emily knew the month and exact hour of her death is important because it is evidence that something *highly unusual* was occurring in her life. Human beings do not ordinarily have access to such information. Only God knows the future, and *only God knows when we will die*. Dickinson’s strange foreknowledge strongly suggests that she has been interacting with the divine world. The poet’s successful prediction about the time of her death challenges us to look more closely at the rest of her mysterious writings to see what else we can find.

A new perspective is dawning. Dickinson was no ordinary poet and no ordinary person. There is much more going on than meets the eye at first glance.

Before we finish this chapter, consider another prediction the poet made.

Big my Secret but it's *bandaged* –
It will never get away
Till the Day its Weary Keeper
Leads it through the Grave to thee.

(Johnson p.704)

(Late 1861)

In the last stanza of Poem 1737, Dickinson tells us that **Big** is **her Secret**, but **it will never get away** until after she dies and **Leads it through the Grave to thee**. This means that Emily, the **Weary Keeper**, will **Lead her Big Secret** to someone after her death. But *what* is Emily's **Big Secret**, *who* will she **Lead** it to, and *how* could she **Lead** it to anyone after she has died?

To find out, we must delve deeper into her work, peeling back the layers of her **Big Secret** one poem at a time. We will see that the poet **Led her Big Secret through the grave** by embedding it in the **lines** of her poetry. Dickinson knew her verse would eventually be published and unraveled after she died. She knew her **Riddle** would be solved, and her **Big Secret** uncovered. She told us in the **lines** of her poetry!

*Excerpt from *Emily Dickinson, Poet and Prophet*, "My message must be told!" J.P. Ladd. 2023. Xulon Press

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Introduction—

Emily Dickinson, Poet and Prophet

(The **bolded words** are keywords from the poem under discussion.

The **numbers** in parentheses are the Johnson Numbers of the poems referenced.)

I first learned of Emily Dickinson in 1998 while listening to some educational tapes on a long car trip. One cassette was devoted to her poetry—I was immediately drawn in!

Soon after, while reading *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*,¹³ I was struck by the profound insights the poet had crystallized into short poems. They were sparkling gems with facets made of words.

Dickinson thought her poems would be categorized and classified by experts who would, nevertheless, *not understand them*. She poked good-natured fun at experts and “**Scientists**” and referred to them as “**Savants**” and “**monsters with (spy) glasses**” (168,70). Such learned people are usually considered high priests of knowledge. But Dickinson disagreed, and her reservations about their interpretations of her work have been amply borne out.

While studying Dickinson’s work, I noticed many unusual features. There were mysteries and riddles, and some of her verses were incomprehensible. Each additional piece of the Dickinson puzzle drew me further in until, finally, an incredible picture emerged!

At first, I hesitated to share my findings due to their highly unusual nature, but eventually, I overcame my doubts and began to write. Surprisingly, several more puzzle pieces surfaced when I was nearly finished. I realized then that my ideas about the Dickinson mystery had been evolving for a long time! Whenever I thought I had understood, a new element would appear.

Dickinson is one of the best-known and most-beloved American poets, but most would agree that she has also been an enigma. Many questions still lingered. Why was she so averse to publishing? Why did she keep most of her work secret from everyone, even her closest family and friends? What prompted her seclusion? Why did she always dress in white, and why was she buried in a white casket?

Dickinson died in 1886, and her complete work has been available since 1955. Yet, little progress has been made in answering these questions. Fortunately, the great poet left behind some clues.

The first clue was in Poem 50, where she *predicted* that “**One would walk within the Riddle**” and solve it someday. The first chapter’s title, “**The Day that I shall Go**” hints at the subject of that “**Riddle**.” Its solution is critical because it sets the stage for the discoveries in the rest of the book. What is the “**Riddle**,” and who is the “**One**” who would solve it?

The second clue was in Poem 1737, where the poet proclaimed, “**Big is my Secret**,” and that it would remain “**bandaged**” or covered up until she “**Led it through the grave**” to someone after her death. What is Dickinson’s “**Big Secret**?” Who would she “**Lead it**” to, and how could she “**Lead it**” to anyone after she died?

The third clue was in Poem 160, where the poet described herself as a **“pale Reporter”** with **“Odd secrets of the line to tell.”** In other words, Dickinson was **“telling Odd secrets”** in the **“lines”** of her poems, which explains *how* the poet was going to **“Lead her Big secret through the grave”** after her death.

Dickinson’s poems have been unraveled. Her **secrets** have been extracted from the **“lines”** of her poetry. Her **“Riddle”** has been solved. Her **“Odd secrets”** have been uncovered, and her **“Big Secret”** has been revealed. The poet’s prediction that **“One”** would **“Walk within”** and solve the **“Riddle”** has been fulfilled one hundred and sixty years after she made it.

This text is a journey through the mysteries and revelations uncovered in Dickinson’s poetry. An obscure **“Riddle”** has opened the door to poet’s secret world, and a radically *new perspective* has emerged!

Chapter 9 is different from the others. It is inspired by one of Dickinson’s poems (400) and is a unique view of the end-times in which we live. The chapter includes topics such as Biblical prophecy, the Book of Enoch, the New World Order, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *Lost Story of Melchizedek*, and a startling new prediction about an event that will end the age. Otherwise, the book is an entirely new analysis of nearly one hundred poems from Dickinson’s trove of once-private treasures.

Who was the real Emily Dickinson, and what was her life really about? What is the **“Big Secret”** she **“Led through the Grave,”** and what is **“The Message that must be told”** mentioned in the Title?

Before getting to the all-important **“Riddle”** in Chapter 1, *Important Preliminary Notes* and a brief *Biographical Sketch* come next.

After that, the fun begins... So, fasten your seat belts. Don your thinking caps and enjoy the ride!